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MY AMERICAN EXPERIENCES.

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS REPUBLIC.

FROM my early boyhood I desired to visit America, not that I wished to seek a new home there, or merely to satisfy my curiosity or my love of travel, for the land and people of the United States always excited an interest in me which had something of the fascinating power of magnetism.

I left the University of Jena on the 13th of November, 1860, and reached New York after a stormy voyage of twenty-one days. The political situation in the United States at that time was comparable with the sultry air which precedes a thunderstorm. In South Carolina the Governor had declared, that in the event of Mr. Lincoln's election the only alternative left was the secession of that State from the federal Union; and if, he said, the Government of the United States, forgetful of the lessons of history, should attempt coercion, it would become the solemn duty of the South to meet force by force.

I remained in New York only a few days, but long enough to receive a lasting impression of the tremendous energy which pulsed in the waving life of the Empire City. I was particularly struck by the discovery which I made there that in the United States the task of the policemen is not to vex their fellow-citizens, but to protect women and children, who were led safely through

the bustle of wagons by the stately bluecoats. In the old country the police had in those times not yet reached this degree of perfection.

My destination was the Looking-Glass Prairie, near Highland, Madison County, Illinois, where the Swiss colony, of which the brothers K pfli, of Lucerne, had laid the foundation in the third decade of our century, was situated. Here I hoped to become acquainted with the real life of the American farmer, which fiction had always painted to me in the most friendly and peaceful colors. The country around Highland, called Looking-Glass Prairie, is a fertile plain. The town itself lies upon several hills, one of which is called the "Rigi," a very bold comparison, but one which reflects honor upon the good heart and the patriotic sentiments of the first settlers.

It is said that the mountaineer living in the level country feels unhappy. I passed my youth in Switzerland, and spent three years as a student in Jena, in the midst of the castle-crowned hills of Thuringia ; but I never felt more happy and more pleased than during my brief sojourn at Looking-Glass Prairie.

I will not attempt to compare Highland and its surroundings with the lake of Lucerne and its environment, but a man who has seen the Looking-Glass Prairie in a clear moonlight night without having been touched is, in my opinion, incapable of feeling the grand beauty of the R tli.

My good parents had furnished me with pocket-money far beyond my merit, so that I could have afforded to look upon the farmers' life in easiness. But I preferred to work and took a place with a farmer, whose name was Leder. He had been born in Ober-Flachs, Canton of Aargau. To distinguish him from his two brothers he was called the Little Leder. In his youth, as coachman, he had driven my father to the federal Diet at Lucerne. The Little Leder was therefore proud of his new hand ; and although nearly everybody at Highland knew me, he never failed to present me with the words, "Here is Frey, my servant." Twenty years later, when I visited Highland as the first Minister of Switzerland to the United States, Little Leder appeared at one of the dinners offered to me in those joyful days, exclaiming, as I had predicted, "This is Minister Frey, who once was my servant, my *servant*." I, on my part, was not less proud of being a farm-hand, and I think I may say that little

Leder never had a hand who was more exact in the fulfilling of his duty than myself.

Our daily fare consisted of coffee, bacon, and cornbread. The bacon was not of the finest quality, and I had to take some coffee after every morsel, in order to wash it down as fast as possible. It seems that Mrs. Leder remarked this, for one day she told me that henceforth a special piece of bacon would be on the plate for me. But Mrs. Leder had not reckoned with my neighbor, a tall, fine-looking man from the canton of Solothurn, called Ruedi, who, without further ceremony, took the select piece the first time it was provided and put it on his plate. This misfortune, however, did not occur to me again, for the next day I was quicker than Ruedi in laying hold of it, and from that time I enjoyed the uncontested possession of this privilege.

Not very far from Highland there was living, on his farm, Frederick Hecker, the most eminent and popular man of the German Revolution of 1848. He was an accomplished lawyer of great learning, a famous and imaginative speaker, and a man of great, sometimes even rough, openness. There never was a man more unselfish or a more fervent idealist, and never was I more proud of a man's friendship than I was of the paternal affection with which Hecker, who was a friend of my father, honored me. I visited him several times at his farm; and four years later, it was he who cordially received me when I came out of my southern captivity, broken and miserable.

In the mean time the storm had broken out. Abraham Lincoln had hardly ascended the presidential chair when the first gun was fired in the port of Charleston. In vain did Mr. Lincoln assure the people of the South in his inaugural address that they had no cause of apprehension either as to their property or persons from the accession of a Republican administration. In vain he declared that he had no intention to interfere directly or indirectly with slavery in the States where it existed. In vain he declared that he held the Union to be perpetual, a government, and not a mere association, of the States, and that no State of its own mere motion could lawfully go out of the Union. In vain he added: "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being the aggressors."

The storm broke out. Mr. Lincoln called for volunteers. The people of the North responded cheerfully. One of the first who hastened to offer his service to the country was Frederick Hecker. He entered as a private in the regiment of Franz Sigel, his friend and companion in 1848, and some time afterwards a regiment of volunteers was raised for him and placed under his command. It was the Twenty-fourth Illinois.

I had in the mean time sojourned some days at Quincy, Ill., and on the 17th of June I enlisted in the 24th at Chicago. On the same day I was appointed by Colonel Hecker to be color-bearer of the regiment, and in the evening we left Chicago for Alton, Ill.

Thus I became a soldier; why, is a question not easily answered. I am the descendant of an old family of soldiers, whose blood has been shed on many a battle-field. Mine I had shed hitherto only in duels during my student life. The prospect of fighting in a jolly, merry campaign possessed a great charm for me, and I will not deny that this was one reason which induced me to enter into the regiment of Hecker. But I dare say that I was not less inspired by the idea of supporting the great cause of the republic, of fighting for the preservation of the Union. I was at that time old enough to comprehend that the dismemberment of the United States would seriously injure the cause of liberty in the world and that the idea of republican government would develop itself in a very different way if, instead of the one and indivisible Union, several groups of rival States should be established on the American continent.

Besides this I was, like every well-educated European, a decided abolitionist. However, I was not a mere adventurer, when on June 17, 1861, I received out of Colonel Hecker's hand the colors of the regiment, and well may I add that no native American was prouder than I to bear the Star-Spangled Banner. And never did I change my feeling during all the fatigues and dangers of the war.

And we did not have to wait very long for perils and hardships. First we made war more or less on our own responsibility in the country near Charles City, Mo., against the rebel bush-whackers, who had made their appearance there. Afterwards we served in southern Missouri under the command of Prentiss.

One day we heard that we were assigned to the brigade of

General Grant and that he would inspect the regiment. We were placed in line and every preparation for inspection was made, but the general did not appear. I was somewhat astonished when, nevertheless, the colonel commanded, "Present arms!" Two inconspicuous riders, who had remained for some time opposite to the left wing of the regiment, then moved forward towards the colonel. These two horsemen were, as we soon learned, General Grant and his aide-de-camp, a German major named Kraut.

The General wore at that time a long beard without a moustache. We had yet heard little or nothing of the future conqueror of the Confederacy, so that the ceremony, I confess, failed to make a great impression upon us. But subsequently I never neglected to mention the fact that I had belonged to the first brigade which Ulysses S. Grant had commanded.

Soon after this I brought to General Grant two prisoners who had been captured by our regiment. He had taken up his headquarters at Pilot Knob, and was staying in a small, low house surrounded by an orchard. The General came out, himself, to receive my report, and addressed several questions to me. My English in those days was most defective, as I fear it is still, and I am afraid the General learned but little profitable news from me. Nevertheless he dismissed me not unkindly.

During the war I seldom saw General Grant. Our regiment was soon afterwards sent to Kentucky, where we were put under the orders of a leader not less famous, General Sherman. Many years after the war I met General Grant at Washington, where he spent some time as a guest of his friend General Beale. Immediately after his arrival I paid my respects to him, and he was kind enough to return my visit the following day, although my residence was at least three miles from General Beale's house. The former General-in-Chief and President of the United States came to me in a modest carriage. It was soon after his return from his journey around the world. During this voyage, when he arrived at Basel, I had received him, together with the United States Consul, Mr. Erny. But as he did not seem to remember the fact, I did not speak about it.

On the other hand, we conversed about the impressions which the General had received in Europe, especially in Paris. And if I say "we," I must add that it was not I, but the taci-

turn General, who bore almost alone the brunt of the conversation. In clear language he described the political situation of Europe at that time, throwing interesting accidental lights on the leading statesmen, with the greater number of whom he had become acquainted, and whom, as far as I could judge, he described very accurately. Suddenly he paused and exclaimed, "I forget that you are a European, and that you must know all these things better than I."

I often saw the General afterwards in Washington, and he always had a warm handshake and a kind word for me. I desire here to express the most lively feelings of gratitude for the great cordiality and kindness shown to me during my stay at Washington by other eminent generals of the Union, notably Sherman, Sheridan, McClellan, Rosecrans, Schofield, Hunt, and many others.

I have heard many opinions about General Grant, and I suppose it would little interest the readers of this REVIEW to know what I think of him—from a military point of view. But I believe that the impartial historian cannot but render him this justice: that he had in a high degree the capacity of making great resolutions and carrying them out with immovable perseverance in spite of all obstacles. And this is in my eyes the most important quality of a commander-in-chief.

Soon after our arrival in Kentucky, Sherman established his headquarters at Louisville. He was at that time but little known, and many of my old comrades may remember that a great number of people thought him a most extravagant kind of a general. But he very soon found occasion to give proof of his great faculties and to make his name immortal.

Our regiment had for a long time been encamped in Colesburgh, Ky., without occupation. At the end of January or in the beginning of February, 1862, we moved towards Bowling Green, and, after having taken that town, advanced against Nashville. From there we went (we belonged to the division of General Mitchell, called the flying division) in forced marches against Murfreesboro and Decatur, Ala., where we had the chance to take a *tête-de-pont* constructed with cotton bales. The principal object was to gain possession, by the capture of Decatur, of the important system of railroads of which that town was the centre. For this successful campaign, General Mitchell, who was known before the war as a great astronomer and whom

the boys called "Old Stars," was promoted to the rank of major-general.

On June 17, 1862, I left the Twenty-fourth Illinois Regiment at Athens, Ala., to raise a company for the Second Regiment of Hecker. I had been made second lieutenant on August 29, 1861, and on January 1, 1862, first lieutenant. In August following, in Camp Butler, near Springfield, Ill., I was unanimously elected captain by my new company. This company, which was mainly composed of Swiss, most of whom I had recruited at Highland, Ill., I instructed with the greatest care, and it was soon considered one of the best in the regiment.

In September we were sent to Washington to be incorporated in the Army of the Potomac. Without staying at Washington, we marched over the long bridge into Virginia, where we camped on the Arlington Heights. I shall never forget the sight which presented itself to our eyes the morning after our arrival—as the sun rose above the Capitol and poured its golden splendor over that wonderful building and the city, to the defence of which we had hastened from the far West.

In the battle of Fredericksburg our regiment, the Eighty-second Illinois, had no direct part. In January, 1863, the passage of the Rappahannock was for the second time tried in vain. Then came the battle of Chancellorsville, in which our regiment lost 156 men out of 450 in about half an hour; and then the battle of Gettysburg.

Our regiment was still commanded by Colonel Hecker, who had fought like a lion at Chancellorsville, where he was seriously wounded. Our brevet-commander was Count Schimmelpfening, a brave soldier, who had learned his business in the German army. The division was commanded by Carl Schurz, who, although not a soldier by profession, always distinguished himself, especially so at the unfortunate battle of Chancellorsville, by his perfect coolness.

The 17th of June was destined to be an important day for me. We were already on the march for the Potomac and for Maryland and Pennsylvania. Colonel Hecker and Major Rolshausen had been wounded at Chancellorsville and they had not yet returned to the regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel Salomon, who went out of the war as a brigadier, then commanded the regiment, and on the 17th of June conferred upon me the functions of an acting major. I

therefore made the campaign of Gettysburg on horseback. I was very happy over this distinction, though it was to prove the cause of my misfortune. On the evening of the first day of the battle of Gettysburg I was taken prisoner with 3,000 others during the retreat through the town, and I am still sure that I could have escaped, had I not thought it my duty and a point of honor to remain on horseback to the last moment. If I had been on foot, it would have been an easy thing for me to get forward with the compact mass of our retiring troops, whilst on horseback I was constantly stopped and finally cut off with seventy-six men of our regiment and taken prisoner.

“Captive” is a terrible word, the significance of which can only be conceived by him who has been in the unfortunate position which it describes. Never, assuredly, had the horrors of war made a more dreadful impression upon our soldiers than on that day. I, for my part, shall never forget the thrilling scenes which presented themselves to us as we were led back over our own fighting-ground, passing by a number of the dead and wounded of our own regiment.

I received a touching proof of the attachment of my soldiers on that evening. My horse having been taken from me as soon as we were made prisoners, I found myself bereft of everything. The men soon knew it, and, without my being able to prevent it, they made a collection among themselves, and in a short time I was provided with blanket, breadbag, and canteen—in short, with everything a man needs in the field.

However, I did not long enjoy the use of these, for, on our arrival at Staunton, after a painful march of seventeen days, the commissioned officers were packed up in a wagon, and, before starting, everything except our clothes was taken from us. Very fortunately I had been able on the journey to sell my field-glass to a Confederate officer.

I shall not try to describe our life in Libby Prison, where we were incarcerated. I know that the present generation of the people of the Southern States refuses to believe the fact that the Northern prisoners were ill-treated and that thousands of our brave boys died of want and hunger. And it would not be a new story for the people of the North to hear. I will therefore confine myself to a few remarks about my personal experiences during those eighteen and a half months which I spent at

Richmond, Salesbury, and Danville, as a prisoner of the Confederate States.

We arrived at Richmond on the 18th of July, 1863. The room beneath ours in Libby Prison was occupied by citizens of Maryland and Pennsylvania, who had been made prisoners by General Lee on his expedition through these States a short time before. Some of us still had a few pieces of hard bread, and, hearing that these citizens endured the most bitter hunger, we threw it to them through the cleft of a trap-door. Never shall I forget the sight of these men, whose appearance bore the stamp of respectability and wealth, rushing with vehemence towards those wretched crumbs. They fought, and snatched them away from each other; and it was painful to watch those who came out victorious in the contest, devouring the bread. After that we had no doubt as to what we had to expect.

Among the Northern officers at Libby Prison we found that those of Colonel Streight's command were the most numerous. Two of them, Captains Sawyer and Flinn, had just been selected as hostages for two Confederate officers who by order of the United States Government were to be executed. Their fate seemed to be inevitable, and I have rarely seen anything so sad as those two officers in their desolate hopelessness. The hair of one of them turned white in a few days. Suddenly a report was circulated that our troops had taken prisoner a son of General Lee, and that a categorical declaration had been sent to Richmond from the United States Government, that the execution of Sawyer and Flinn would be immediately followed by that of young Lee. The lives of Sawyer and Flinn were thus saved and a few months later they were exchanged.

Ten months after my capture the fate which they had escaped seemed in store for me. A Northern court-martial had condemned to death three Confederate officers, Major Armsey, Captain Gordon, and Lieutenant Davis. By order of Jefferson Davis, three of our officers were taken as hostages for the condemned, and the lot fell upon Major Robert Goff, of West Virginia, Lieutenant Manning, of Massachusetts, and myself. The commander of the Libby Prison apprised us of this fact, and declared positively that if Armsey, Gordon, and Davis should be hanged, no earthly power would save us from the same fate. Without further notice we were transferred to the cellar, and there confined to

a dark cell, nine feet long by six and a half feet wide. This happened on May 3d, 1864. I was then twenty-five and a half years of age, the oldest of the three.

We had hitherto suffered almost unbearable hunger, but there now began, besides the agony of confinement, real starvation. Our daily ration, which we received every day about noon, consisted of a little piece of cornbread, a morsel of rancid bacon, and six or seven spoonfuls of niggerbeans or rice of the meanest quality. By strict order of the government, the total ration was not to exceed the weight of three-quarters of a pound and two ounces. Very fortunately, there were a number of rats in the cellar, and they paid us a visit the first night of our confinement. Friend Manning, who was a clever and imaginative man, proposed to hunt these horrid animals, which, especially at night, used to fight most fiercely. He constructed a trap, and we used our half-rotten bacon as bait. The rat having been caught, it was my business to raise the cover until it showed its head, when the major had to set to work and to belabor its head with a log until it was dead. Next morning the rats were cooked by the negro who had to clean our cell, and then we ate them. It required a dreadful hunger to conquer the disgust we had for these beasts.

On May 21 a waiter told us that we should probably not be hanged. No other notice was given to us. The fact that President Lincoln had suspended the execution of the three Confederate officers, and that by order of the Department of War three Confederate officers had been taken as hostages for us and had been placed in confinement, Captain Wm. G. Stewart being selected a hostage for me, was concealed from us.

The cell next to ours was soon filled with other hostages, among them being Lieutenants Markbreit and Pavey. Hence sprung up between us a friendship as lively as our increasing weakness would permit. We told stories of home, sweet home, and, the same tales being related over and over again, we finally decided that it should be forbidden to repeat the same thing more than ten times. In accordance with this resolution many a tale was stopped in the telling, although the narrator would affirm solemnly that he was only telling his story for the second time. After a short time we were no longer able to walk, and looked like skeletons. I had to spend some days at the hospital, and

was horrified, on coming back, by the appearance of my companions. One day we received our daily ration at four o'clock P. M., instead of at noon, and we had then become so weak through the delay that we could not eat anything that day.

On the 18th day of July we were transferred by railroad to the military penitentiary at Salisbury, N. C., together with some negro soldiers, the doctor having declared that a longer stay in the cell, a description of which I will spare my readers, would undoubtedly kill us. In the penitentiary of Salesbury we were confined together with a band of criminals, and were in constant danger of our lives, until, after the arrival of a further party of our prisoners, we were in the majority. A plan for a general outbreak having been betrayed, the officers were all transported to Danville, and then back to Richmond.

On the 14th of January, 1865, I was exchanged against Captain Gordon. I owed my liberty to the efforts of friends, but above all to the successful intervention of the celebrated American dentist, Dr. Thomas Evans, the same who five years afterwards saved the life of the Empress Eugénie, on the 4th of September, 1870.

I saw Captain Gordon for the first time the 15th of September, 1882, on my arrival in Washington as Swiss Minister. A few weeks ago a Washington paper contained a notice of the captain's death. The article, decorated with our portraits, was inscribed, "A pair for life."

In the winter of 1883 I met Goff and Markbreit at a reception given by Senator Chandler, then Secretary of the Navy. Goff had in the mean time been Secretary of the Navy under President Hayes, and Markbreit had represented the United States as a minister resident in a South American republic.

We did not think of that in our cell.

EMIL FREY.